Table of Contents

1. RiverClan
2. ShadowClan
3. Prologue
4. Chapter 1
5. Chapter 2
6. Chapter 3

RiverClan

Leader
Blizzardstar- White tom with silver speckles across back & face with icy blue eyes.
Deputy
Smokefeather- mottled gray tom with yellow eyes
Warriors
Clearwater- dark gray tom with amber eyes
Echobreeze- silver she cat with white & dark gray splotches & icy blue eyes
Amberwillow- dark ginger tabby she cat with pale yellow eyes
Troutleap- brown & black mottled tom with yellow eyes
Fernshade- dark gray tabby she cat with pale blue eyes
Rowanstream- reddish brown she-cat with white paws & amber eyes
Cinderflame- jet black tabby tom with amber eyes
Stormblaze- dark gray & white mottled tom with yellow eyes
Duskpelt- black tom with flecks of silver along pelt & sky blue eyes
Lilacfrost- white & brown splotched tabby she cat with green eyes
Gingerflame- bright orange she cat with green eyes
Elders
Timbermoss- reddish brown tom with amber eyes
Sunflight- orange & white she cat with green eyes
Queens
Robinflight- orange & black she cat with yellow eyes
•Stormkit- gray tom with blue eyes
•Mosskit-tortoiseshell she with amber eyes
Ripplesong- silver she cat with icy blue eyes
•Nightkit-gray & white splotched tabby tom with sky blue eyes
Apprentices
Brackenpaw- mottled brown tabby tom with green eyes
Pinepaw- dark brown tom with yellow eyes
Dovepaw- light gray she cat with pale blue eyes
Medicine cat
Mintberry- black & gray she cat with mint green eyes

ShadowClan

Leader
Adderstar- pale gold tabby tom with green eyes
Deputy
Redfeather- bright ginger tom with amber eyes
Warriors
Leafdapple- tortoiseshell she cat with amber eyes
Stoneheart- gray tom with green eyes
Breezewillow- heather tabby she cat with bright blue eyes
Lightningstrike- pale brown tabby tom with bright green eyes
Rosefall- brown she cat with flecks of dark ginger & black with amber eyes
Magpiefeather- black and white spotted tom with yellow eyes
Timberfall- dark brown tabby tom with mint green eyes
Fallingwind- gray & white tabby tom with yellow eyes
Elders
Mistybreeze- silver she cat with white fleck & green eyes
Shallowstep- bright orange Tom with green eyes
Queens
Turtleshine- tortoiseshell she cat with Amber eyes
•Rosekit- cream she cat with yellow eyes
Apprentices
Tidepaw- brown & white Tom with yellow eyes
Beetlepaw- black & gray spotted she cat with Amber eyes
Falconpaw- mottled brown tabby with green eyes
Medicine cat
Mudfoot- brown tom with yellow eyes

Prologue

Ripplesong padded though the forest, her paw pads springy on the soft green moss. Her belly was heavy with the weight of her kits. She stopped at the pebbly shore of the river, staring into her reflection. Her icy blue eyes stared back at her, bearing into her fur.

She shivered. She had always been uncomfortable with the intense glare of her unusually bright, ominous eyes. She knew other cats were uncomfortable with them as much as she was. She stared into the river once more & let out a long sigh.

"Enjoying the view of the river, huh?" The deep voice from the other side of the river startled Ripplesong, & her silver fur stood on end.

"Timberfall? What in StarClan's name are you doing this close to the border?" Ripplesong hissed. "If my cats catch a ShadowClan cat on the border, they'll tear you to shreds!"

The brown tabby blinked his mint green eyes curiously at her. "I just came to check on you. I'll be careful to cover my scent when I leave this time, I promise."

Ripplesong smiled at the memory of a RiverClan patrol scenting his ShadowClan pelt from his previous visit. The scent was so recent, she remembered, that one of the warriors had her apprentice search underwater in case he had been hidden there. The poor apprentice had hit her head on a rock & been restricted to the medicine den with a concussion for a moon. "Poor Dovepaw," she murmured to herself, stifling a purr of amusement.

Timberfall dove into the river & struggled to fight the current, paws churning violently. He reached the shore on RiverClan's side, panting, & touched Ripplesong's shoulder with his tail tip. "You seem in a good mood today," he remarked, licking her cheek.

"Just remembered something amusing from a few days ago,"

Ripplesong murmured, her tail twining with his. They gazed into each other's eyes for a moment, then turned to gaze into the river together. Timberfall was the only cat that ever could stand to look into her eyes. He always told her that he thought they were unique & beautiful, alike to the gentle flow of the river.

"So... What are you going to say when your clanmates ask who the father of our kits are?" Timberfall questioned, touching his tail to Ripplesong's swollen belly.

Ripplesong flicked an ear. "We queens have a right to reserve the name of the father," she licked a paw & swiped it over her ear. "I'll just not say anything about it. The whole clan will probably just assume the father is Clearwater, who practically admires me." She sighed.

"Clearwater, huh?" Timberfall muttered. "You don't like him too, do you?"

"Of course not. If anything, I think of him as a friend." Ripplesong glared at her mate. "Don't disrespect him. He will save the clan from wondering who the father is and questioning me and my future kits' loyalty. He might even treat the kits as his own, even though he knows they are not his."

Timberfall did not say anything. He just stared into the river, which was lapping at his paws. "Why me?" He turned to Ripplesong, his tone calm & neutral. "Why would you choose me as a mate, a cat from another clan, when it sounds like another cat wanted your love? You could have had everything. A mate, kits, & lived a happy, loyal life where no one would ever question you of your loyalty. But instead, you chose to love me, a ShadowClan cat, while you are a RiverClan cat? It is forbidden love. This will just make our future & our kits' future worse than it could be." He sighed.

Ripplesong just stared at him, astonished at his words. "It is because I love you, & only you, Timberfall."Ripplesong spoke firmly. "Clearwater couldn't have my love, even if I tried to love him back. Now you & I, we were destined to be together." Ripplesong whispered, staring into her mate's eyes once again.

Before Timberfall could say a word, Ripplesong felt a sharp pain in her belly & let out a screech. "Go, Timberfall, back to your clan! My kits are coming!" Her eyes widened as she staggered in the direction of RiverClan's camp.

"I want to help!" Timberfall pleaded.

Ripplesong turned to glare at her mate. "I'll be fine. If they catch you here, your be crow food!" She turned & staggered deeper into her territory, dragging her swollen belly with her.

Timberfall stared after her a few moments before turning & swimming across the river the way he had come, & disappearing into the ominous shadows of ShadowClan territory.

Author's note: If you are one of those people who studies books wisely, you'll realize that there is no river between RiverClan & ShadowClan. Instead, there is a dock for boats. (Setting is in the new territory) In fact, this book takes place when the cats have settled by the lake for so long that they have seen "twoleg" settlement areas come & go. Time has passed so much that they decided to tear down the dock in between the two territories & replace it with a man made river to help conserve wildlife and such. Sorry for the confusion!

Chapter 1

"I've got you now!" Nightkit hissed playfully at Stormkit as he lightly pinned him to the ground.

"You'll never get me, even if you tried!" Stormkit shoved him off, sending Nightkit staggering into a fresh pile of moss that the apprentices had brought to line the nursery with. He remembered that Dovepaw, one of the older apprentices, even brought brightly colored shells to decorate the bland den.

Stormkit advanced, creeping closer to him with every passing second. "Time to accept defeat, ShadowClan scum!" Stormkit yowled playfully, leaping at Nightkit & cuffing his ear with a paw.

Nightkit angrily shook him off. "I thought you were the ShadowClan warrior!" he snorted. "I wanted to be the RiverClan warrior this time! It was my turn!"

Stormkit blinked his blue eyes in confusion, his gray fur ruffled. "Oh," he muttered, looking at his paws. "How about we play a different game instead?"

Nightkit sensed the hurt in his tone. He prodded his denmate with a paw. "Sorry. You can be the RiverClan warrior again if you want," he offered, glancing around the nursery.

The nursery was rather large & open, lined with fresh springy moss & occasional heron feathers for extra comfort. The sunlight illuminated the various shells scattered on the edges of the nest, & he liked to use them for various games with his denmates. The air smelled warm & welcoming, & the sun was in the perfect position to shine straight into the nursery.

A loud cry interrupted Nightkit's thoughts. "You guys were playing? Without me?" Mosskit wailed, staring at him & Stormkit.

"You were asleep," Stormkit muttered. "We didn't want to wake

you."

Mosskit blinked her amber eyes sleepily, & Nightkit noticed that she had just woken up, noting her matted, tangled fur that she usually kept clean & tidy. She saw Nightkit's sky blue eyes staring into hers & her eyes brightened.

"Nightkit!" She purred. "You always come up with fun games. Do you know of any at this moment?"

"Uh," Nightkit stammered. "What about we play 'Climb the moss pile'?" He flicked his tail to the moss pile that he was flung into earlier when he & Stormkit were play fighting.

"Not so fast," Nightkit hissed to himself in annoyance as his mother, Ripplesong, entered the nursery. "I have to line the nest with this moss. I don't want you kits messing it up so we can't use it!" Ripplesong's icy blue eyes were spiked with annoyance as the kits gave a long sigh in unison.

"Sorry, kits. I thought you wanted fresh bedding." Ripplesong murmured, padding past the cluster of annoyed kits. "Why don't you go play outside instead? You all are nearly 5 moons. It's time you've got to know you clanmates before you become apprentices.

Nightkit took in a sharp breath at the word 'apprentices'. "Great idea, Ripplesong! Let's go!" Nightkit's tail waved as he turned & slipped out of the nursery, & his denmates immediately darted after him, leaving Ripplesong in peace.

"Hi, kits," spoke a familiar voice that Nightkit associated with the nursery. It was Stormkit & Mosskit's mother, Robinflight. Nightkit saw how she got her name, her orange & black fur resembling a robin's feathers. "Exploring the camp?"

"Yes!" Mosskit purred. "We are going to talk with the other cats & make new friends!"

"It sounds silly when you say it like that," Stormkit nudged her sister, amused. "We just want to familiarize ourselves with the other cats before we become apprentices."

"Oh, I see," Robinflight replied. "Well, have fun! I'll be in the nursery helping Ripplesong with the bedding. Call if you need anything!" The sleek queen turned & made her way into the nursery.

Nightkit's eyes caught on Smokefeather, the RiverClan deputy. Smokefeather returned the stare with his piercing yellow eyes. To avoid tension, Nightkit smiled at the well known cat & looked away.

"I'm going to explore in here," Stormkit glanced into the medicine cat's den, which was neighboring the nursery.

"Me too!" Mosskit squeaked, charging after her brother.

"You guys have fun with that," Nightpaw called after them, his nose wrinkling at the tangy scent of fresh herbs. He knew the life of a medicine cat was not for him, & that he was certain of. A tall RiverClan cat bumped into him, a large trout hanging from his jaws.

"Sorry," he muttered through the prey he was carrying, & dropped it on the ground next to him.

"Oh, hi, Clearwater!" Nightpaw recognized the dark gray tom, well-known for his skills in swimming. Rumor has it that the cat could hold his breath long enough to catch ten minnows.

"Nightkit," Clearwater greeted in return, flicking an ear. "So you are growing to the apprentice age, are you?" he asked.

"Oh, yes!" Nightkit's eyes shined excitedly. "I hope you will be my mentor. You're a really amazing warrior!"

Clearwater's eyes glowed with pride as he heard the kit speak of him so highly. "I hope so too, young one." he then glanced in the direction of the nursery, & his eyes clouded.

"Is... Something wrong?" Nightkit asked, noticing the longing look in the cat's eyes.

Clearwater blinked, shaking his head. "Of course not." He

murmured, bending his head to pick up the large trout. He waved a goodbye with his tail and left to place the plump fish on the fresh-kill pile with the other catches. Suddenly, Nightkit's eyes caught on a glare from a pair of yellow eyes.

"Stormblaze," Nightkit whispered to himself, shivering. The ominous warrior turned & padded into the warriors den. He caught his breath when he noticed the deep scars slashed across his mangy gray & white pelt. If there was one cat in RiverClan that Nightkit was not comfortable with, it was him.

He shook the thought from his head, ashamed he had thought of his clanmate in such a disrespectful way. Sure, the tom was genuinely terrifying, but there had to be some good in him.

He turned and winced as he saw his denmates talking with their father, Cinderflame. He wished he knew who his father was. He even questioned Ripplesong, but she just firmly shook her head & replied that she would tell him when the time was right.

Nightkit hated that his mother could be so mysterious sometimes, but also felt bad for her since few cats ever wanted to talk to her. Nightkit didn't really understand why. Maybe it was because of her unusual eyes? He didn't have a problem with them, but a lot of other cats did, apparently.

Nightkit's gray & white tabby fur fluffed up when he heard a shriek by the river. "What was that?" He hissed, eyes wide & darting around camp. He noticed that the other cats had the same reaction as him to the strange noise.

"Remain calm, everyone," a deep mew caught Nightkit by surprise, & he looked up to see Blizzardstar, the RiverClan leader, looking down at his uneasy cats. Nightkit heard whipsers & murmurs as the clan gathered beneath the gaze of their leader.

Suddenly, Duskpelt & his apprentice, Brackenpaw, burst into the clearing. A bloodstained, dark gray tabby pelt hung from the noble warrior's shoulders. Noticeable wounds were etched in both of the cats' pelts, & their ears were torn.

"What happened?" Smokefeather padded forward, his tail erect. Nightkit was frozen to the spot. He turned & saw Mosskit and Stormkit huddled together, their eyes wide & focused on the bloody scene. In fact, the whole camp was staring, no one daring to utter a word.

Brackenpaw helped Duskpelt heave the lifeless body off his mentor's shoulders, & lay it in the clearing beneath the Highrock. Nightkit's blood ran cold when he recognized the once beautiful she cat, now unmoving. It was Fernshade.

"No!" Nightkit heard a wail, & turned his head in the direction of the sorrowful voice. It was Troutleap, Fernshade's mate. Troutleap rushed over to her once energetic body, and his tail drooped. "This can't be happening," the tom shook his head. "She was carrying our kits!"

This comment earned various gasps and whispers from the observing clan. Some cats looked away, while others unsheathed their claws & dug them in the ground.

"ShadowClan..." Duskpelt lashed his tail, anger burning in his blue eyes. "There were so many of them..." The upset warrior collapsed on the dusty camp floor, which Nightkit assumed was from exhaustion from his various battle wounds. The medicine cat, Mintberry, rushed into the clearing & dragged him into the medicine den by the scruff.

"Me, Duskpelt & Fernshade were by the river. Duskpelt wanted to show his sister how much he trained me by watching me hunt. I had caught about three fish when suddenly, what seemed like a whole ShadowClan patrol burst through the trees on the other side of the river and swam across to meet us." Brackenpaw spoke, his ears laid back.

The small tom's sides heaved, & Nightkit could tell he was struggling to breathe. "They had us surrounded, & tried to force us to give them the fish I had caught. I don't know why, prey should be plentiful in greenleaf. They shouldn't have had to steal our prey."

Loud gasps & hisses of disapproval & dislike for the shadowy cats

echoed through the camp.

"We refused, & they lunged at us. They were so fierce... They were trying to kill us! My mentor and I were fighting side by side when we noticed that Fernshade wasn't moving. We had realized what had happened & surrendered, giving them the fish and running back to camp with her body,"

"This is terrible," Troutleap looked up at Blizzardstar, who was frozen in his words. "We have to avenge her death!" Raged yowls followed his statement in agreement.

"First, we must mourn the death of Fernshade." Blizzardstar looked down at the broken body, shaking his head. "She was a courageous warrior, and would had made an excellent mother," The leader cast a glance at Troutleap. "We must pay our respects to the she cat, and the cats closest to her will sit vigil."

Nightkit's thoughts were interrupted when he was suddenly yanked up by the scruff by his mother. She carried him to the nursery & placed him down. Nightkit noticed his denmates' mother had done the same, Mosskit & Stormkit scrunching up their noses as they were placed in the nursery by Robinflight.

"You kits shouldn't have watched that," Ripplesong glared at the kits disapprovingly.

"Well, there was a serious crisis going on in the clan that we are old enough to know about," Stormkit lashed his tail. "Are we supposed to just ignore all the bad things in clan life?"

Ripplesong turned away & padded out of the den. "Robinflight, please stay here until the kits fall asleep." The queen called behind her. His mother seemed to be unnerved about something.

Without glancing at his denmates' mother, Nightkit curled up & drifted into sleep, the darkness of his vision overwhelming him.

Chapter 2

"Nightpaw! Mosspaw! Stormpaw!" Nightpaw puffed out his chest as his fellow clanmates called out his and his denmates' new names. He was sitting on Highrock next to the huge white speckled leader, along with Mosspaw & Stormpaw. It had been two moons since Fernshade's death, & the clan was stronger than ever.

"Meeting dismissed!" Blizzardstar flicked his tail, jumping down from the tall rock. Mosspaw & Stormpaw carefully made their way down the rock, while Nightpaw recklessly leapt from the rock & landed hard on four paws, just as his leader had done.

"Ready to start training?" A loud voice grumbled, startling the newly fledged apprentice. He swiveled his head towards the voice, realizing it was his new mentor, Stormblaze.

"Sure, I guess," Nightpaw glanced uneasily into his mentor's sharp yellow eyes, then looked away. He noticed Mosspaw was heading out of camp with her mentor, Lilacfrost. His paws itched to follow them & experience their first day as apprentices together, but he knew Stormblaze most likely would not allow it.

"Is something wrong?" Stormblaze glared at him, making Nightpaw's fur rise. His mentor saw that he was looking after Mosspaw & Lilacfrost's departure & hissed. "So you like her, huh?" Stormblaze sneered. Nightpaw felt his fur heat up in embarrassment. "Feeding & fighting the clan is more important than swooning for a silly she cat," Stormblaze growled loudly, & cats turned to look at Nightpaw with interest. He wanted to bury his face into his paws as he felt their stares hot on his pelt. What was he doing? He only thought of Mosspaw as a friend. Why was he so embarrassed?

Stormblaze smirked again at Nightpaw, sensing his embarrassment. "I think you've had enough," he sneered, walking in the direction of the camp exit. Nightpaw glanced around, looking for Stormpaw & his mentor, Troutleap, but they were no where in sight. Nightpaw

assumed they had left camp already, & bolted after Stormblaze.

He took in a sharp breath. He had never been out of camp before. Everything was so big! "Wow," Nightpaw murmured, observing the towering willow trees & the tall grass.

"Big, isn't it," Stormblaze huffed, walking rather fast. Nightpaw struggled to catch up with the long-legged tom, panting.

"Where are we going?" Nightpaw asked, a hint of excitement in his voice.

"The river," Stormblaze grunted. "The one on the ShadowClan border, of course,"

"Cool!" Nightpaw chirped, ears perked. "Am I going to learn how to catch fish?" He flicked his small tail.

"What do you think? We aren't just going to the river to stare at it & do nothing," Stormblaze replied, his tone sharp. This made Nightpaw shrink in his own pelt, unease crawling through his fur. Why was his mentor so mean to him? He thought mentors were supposed to be supportive & caring of their apprentices. Apparently, Stormblaze had a different way of doing things.

Nightpaw twitched an ear when he heard the sound of running water & walked faster, excitement bouncing in each step. Suddenly, a large strip of water came into view.

"Follow me," Stormblaze ordered sternly, & Nightpaw rolled his eyes, creeping after his grumpy mentor. He followed Stormblaze to the pebbly shore of the river, the ice cold water lapping at his paws.

Nightpaw smiled. This was the river, the treasure of RiverClan. It provided the clan with food to get them through harsh weather, advantages in battle, & border markers to separate the RiverClan territory from other clans.

Suddenly, Stormblaze let out a yowl & leapt onto Nightpaw, sending him flying into the river. Nightpaw was stunned, the cold water chilling his body. Before Nightpaw could submerge again, Stormblaze held him down underwater with a large paw. Why was

his mentor doing this? Was he trying to kill him?

Nightpaw's back was held to the pebbles underwater as he struggled to twist away from the large, powerful warrior with no luck. His lungs screamed for air. Stormblaze dug his claws into his chest, causing Nightpaw to shriek in pain. Clouds of crimson blood erupted from his new chest wound, staining the clear water red.

Darkness clouded his vision, & he stopped struggling and went limp. He did not have the strength to go on without air. Suddenly, teeth dug into his scruff & he was hauled out of the water, his fur drenched. He gasped for air, savoring each gulp.

Stormblaze stood over him, a triumphant gleam in his eyes. "That was your first test, & you failed," he casually licked his paw and swiped it over an ear. Test? What test? Nightpaw looked up at his mentor. He felt his own pelt shaking in fear in the presence of the dangerously strong tom.

"W-why did you do that?" Nightpaw stuttered, his wounded chest heaving. Mentors were not supposed to attack their apprentices. Maybe a training battle in the hollow, but not like this.

"True warriors must always be prepared for even the most surprising events," Stormblaze growled, a look of disapproval in his eyes.

"What was I supposed to do?" Nightpaw snapped. "I am barely your size & skill level. It wasn't a fair fight!"

Stormblaze turned on the small tom & unsheathed his claws, raking them across Nightpaw's chest wound & opening it even more. "Never talk back to me," Stormblaze placed a paw on Nightpaw's head & pushed down, digging his muzzle into the dirt. "Now apologize," Stormblaze demanded, his paw pressed firmly in the back of his head.

"I-I'm sorry," Nightpaw struggled to speak through the mouthful of dirt now wedged in his mouth.

"That's what I thought," Stormblaze hissed & lifted his weight off

Nightpaw's head. "Now, if you tell anyone about our little training session today, you will get more punishments like this. Got it?"

Nightpaw shuddered at getting sliced by his mentor's long claws once again. He quickly nodded in agreement. "A-alright," he stammered. "I'll just say I fell & got injured on a large pointy rock, I guess," Nightpaw wondered if this was part of all apprentice training. Was he supposed to get this injured on his first training day? In fact, was he supposed to get injured at all? Why was this training session to be kept a secret?

"That's right," Stormblaze smirked. "I'll train you to be the best warrior you can be. You are one special kit, after all," Nightpaw was puzzled of Stormblaze's statement. Special? Why? He shrugged the questions off, knowing he would probably get clawed for asking them. He looked down & saw that his once white-furred chest was now stained with fresh blood.

"Go clean off your chest in the river," Stormblaze ordered. "I want to avoid the clan asking us questions about your wound," Nightpaw immediately bolted up & ran to the shore, stepping in the river & letting the cold water wash the blood off his wound. He backed out of the river, shaking out his wet fur.

"Come on, let's head back to camp," Stormblaze grinned, running off into the trees towards camp. Nightpaw limped in the direction of his mentor's departure, his chest wound stinging with each step.

Chapter 3

"Wake up!" Nightpaw wearily awoke to his mentor's harsh mew as he prodded his side. Nightpaw blinked & looked around, noticing the camp was still dark and his fellow apprentices were still asleep.

His mentor waited outside the apprentice den as Nightpaw rose to his feet, arching his back in a luxurious stretch. He quickly padded out of the den, & looked up to see the sun had just barely risen.

"Come on, then. We have training to do," Stormblaze urged, darting for the camp exit. Nightpaw felt a sharp pain in his stomach from hunger, & looked longingly at the pile of fish as he followed his mentor out of the soundless camp.

"What type of training?" Nightpaw asked as he noticed Stormblaze was walking along a trail Nightpaw had never been on. The dew on the grass wet Nightpaw's paws.

"Since you failed your first test," Stormblaze began. Nightpaw shivered at Stormblaze's idea of a 'test' he had taken yesterday. His chest wound still throbbed, but the clan strangely didn't ask any questions about it. "I have decided which areas you will improve on," he went on. "I will train you in the categories of reflexes, strength, lung capacity, and determination."

Stormblaze looked over his shoulder as he walked to see Nightpaw's response to his idea, and he immediately nodded. "What will we start with?" Nightpaw questioned, his eyes adjusting to the dark forest.

"Reflexes," Stormblaze murmured in response as he quickly padded in the direction of an unknown setting as Nightpaw followed him.

"I'm a bit hungry, Stormblaze," Nightpaw mentioned cautiously, hoping his statement wouldn't make his mentor angry.

"We train first, Nightpaw," Stormblaze replied in a sharp tone,

startling Nightpaw. "If I thought I should teach you to hunt right now, I would have already," Stormblaze snorted. "You're just not ready," his mentor shook his head as he padded on.

Nightpaw rolled his eyes, the fur along his spine bristling. Hunting is an important skill, Nightpaw thought to himself, why won't I get to learn it? He shrugged the thought away.

"We're here," Stormblaze turned & grinned at Nightpaw as he padded into a sandy clearing. Nightpaw could hear water gurgling nearby. He walked into the clearing, the sand soft under his paws.

"What are we going to do now?" Nightpaw questioned, noticing the sun has risen a little higher as the land got brighter.

"To test your reflexes," Stormblaze began, "I will lunge at you, & you will try to dodge. We will not leave this arena until you improve," Stormblaze spoke, unsheathing his claws. Of course this training would involve claws, Nightpaw thought to himself as he unsheathed his own stubby claws, which were nothing compared to Stormblaze's long dagger-like claws.

"So when do we sta-" Nightpaw was cut off from his sentence as Stormblaze darted forward and clawed his face, the force from the blow sending him flying backwards out of the sandy clearing.

"You weren't ready, fool," Stormblaze spat, shaking his head in annoyance as Nightpaw rose to his feet, blood dripping from his face. "Now let's try this again. Ready?" Stormblaze stood directly across from Nightpaw, who was giving him a foul glare.

Without hesitation, Stormblaze quickly lunged at Nightpaw at top speed like his last attack, except something was different this time. Nightpaw quickly ducked under Stormblaze as he reached for him, & pushed upwards with his back, sending his large mentor flying across the clearing & landing with a loud thump on the sand.

Nightpaw blinked in amazement when he realized he actually retaliated to his tough mentor's attacks, & puffed his chest out with pride.

Stormblaze slowly stood up, confusion in his eyes as he blinked at Nightpaw. "How did you...?" he shook out his fur, scattering sand everywhere from his knotted pelt. "Alright, let's keep practicing."

~~~~~~

"You really stood up against Stormblaze & flung him like that?" Stormpaw gasped, amazement sparkling in his eyes.

Nightpaw looked up from the large pile he was sharing with his nursery denmates. "Yeah," he nodded eagerly. "I'd say it was a miracle, considering how small I am compared to him,"

"You must be really strong!" Mosspaw purred, licking Nightpaw's cheek. Nightpaw immediately felt his fur get hot & turned to stare at her. She was smiling warmly at him, & Nightpaw hesitated before returning the friendly gesture.

"Hey, you guys," Mosspaw heard a deep voice & turned to see Pinepaw, the dark brown senior apprentice. He was accompanied by his littermate, Brackenpaw. "How has your training come along?"

"Awesome!" Mosspaw squealed happily, taking another bite of a pike they were sharing.

"Glad to hear it!" Brackenpaw replied cheerfully, but his smile faded when his gaze rested on Nightpaw's face. "What happened to your face...?" Nightpaw turned away, suddenly feeling the sting of the blow from his mentor.

"Oh, it's nothing," Nightpaw assured them uneasily, taking the last bite of the remains of the pike.

Without another word, Brackenpaw & Pinepaw turned & stalked away. "What's up with them?" Stormpaw blinked, then proceeded to groom his gray fur.

Nightpaw flicked an ear, puzzled at the other apprentices' exit. Did they assume that Stormblaze had inflicted the wound? Did they know something about him? Sighing, Nightpaw got up & touched Mosspaw's side with his tail before padding into the apprentice den.
~~~~~~

He figured he could get some sleep before another round of Stormblaze's challenging training. Covering his facial wound with a paw, he slowly drifted into the darkness of sleep.